

INTERVIEW GUIDE – INVESTIGATING POSSIBLE CO POISONING ON A BOAT

What do you need to know and document about the person?

Symptoms of CO poisoning may include (but are not limited to) one or all of the following: headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, seizures, confusion, altered level of consciousness, loss of consciousness, death. Contrary to what you may have been taught, cherry-red skin or membrane coloration is not common – it occurs only in 2-3% of cases.

Remember, if the person or persons lose consciousness or experience seizures, regain consciousness when removed from exposure, and has no history of that, think CO.

Demographic information: name, age, sex, height, weight

Name of other agencies that might have investigated the incident (and case ID number if known or relevant).

What were the symptoms?

When did the person begin to experience symptoms?

Did the symptoms begin quickly and, similarly go away quickly?

Exactly where were they and what were they doing on the boat when symptoms began? Examples include: sleeping in the lower quarters, sitting in the rear passenger seat, standing on the swim platform.

If the person is unconscious or dead, where were they found?

How many minutes had they been there?

What is their medical history? Do they have a pre-existing medical condition that might cause the symptoms they are experiencing (for example: diabetes, epilepsy,)

Are they on medication or other drugs that might be related to their symptoms?

Are they a smoker? If yes, what do they smoke, and have they smoked within the past 8 hours?

When did they last consume alcohol? If it was recent (within the last four hours, for example), what and how much (estimate) did they drink?

Is the physician/health care provider/coroner planning to measure CO in blood or in exhaled air? If that has been done, what was the % carboxyhemoglobin? How many minutes passed between last CO exposure and when the blood was drawn or exhaled air concentration measured? Was the person given oxygen before the blood was drawn or exhaled air concentration measured?

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What do you need to know and document about the boat?

Boat and engine identification information – manufacturer, year, registration #, length, number of engines, type of engines (inboard, outboard, I/O, drive type, diesel-fueled or gasoline-fueled, etc)

What type of boat is it? Examples include cabin cruiser, houseboat, ski boat, etc.

Was there a source of CO operating at the time the person began to experience symptoms? Examples of sources include a generator, propulsion engines, gasoline-powered pump, propane appliances, charcoal grill, etc.

Where is the exhaust terminus of the CO source? Examples include, through the transom, side, rear of the boat,

What type of fuel is used in any CO source that is in operation? Examples include gasoline, diesel, propane.

Was the boat in proximity to another boat with CO sources operating?

Was the boat near a wall, dock, steep-walled cove, or other obstruction that might have blocked normal dispersal of engine emissions, or normal engine operation?

Was the boat moving or stationary?

What is the hull type (pontoon, monohull, etc.)?

Are there CO detectors on the boat? If so, make and model of the detectors. When were they last tested? Are they operational? Did they sound at any time?

Is there a leak in the exhaust system?

Has the exhaust system been modified in any way?

Are there canopies in place that may have contributed to an accumulation of CO in the area where the person was when they began to experience symptoms?

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What do you need to know about what was happening on the boat?

If there was an internal combustion engine operating anywhere near the person when symptoms began, think CO.

Were there other symptomatic people on the boat?

Were they doing anything differently than normal that might have resulted in a CO poisoning?

Were they towing another boat, or doing anything similar that would have resulted in a low-riding boat attitude and slower than normal operating speed for extended periods of time?

Were they “teak surfing” (pulling people in close proximity to the boat)?

Were any symptomatic people on or near the rear platform while the engines (whether propulsion or generator) operated?

Don’t be led astray by adverse weather conditions. CO can accumulate under decks and in confined spaces even in windy conditions.

Remember, even if they have done the activity a hundred times before without incident, don’t rule out CO.